Marshall Milling Company Grist Mill
South side of French Broad River
Marshall
Madison County
North Carolina

HAER No. NC-19A

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

MARSHALL MILLING COMPANY GRIST MILL HAER No. NC-19-A

Location: South side of the French Broad River, across from the town of Marshall, Madison County, North Carolina

USGS Marshall Quadrangle Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.348000.3962320

Present Owner: French Broad Electric Membership Corporation

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The grist mill building is significant because of its unique architecture. The classical Second Empire style is unique not only to grist mills, but to western North Carolina as well. No other buildings with this style of architecture are known in western North Carolina.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Marshall Milling Company was established on November 26, 1895. In December of that year, the company bought fourteen acres of property on the French Broad River. Construction of the grist mill building, the rock cribbing dam and the wooden log race must have begun immediately, because the mill was in operation and advertising its products in March, 1898 in "The School Itemizer" of Barnard, North Carolina.

The typical grist mill had certain architecturally distinguishing features which are absent or noticeably different at the Marshall Milling Company building. Among these features are:

1. Most mills had a roof extension from which a hoist was attached for raising grain to the top floor. That extension is absent in this mill. Gravity is an important physical element for material handling as the grinders and rollers are fed from the level above through the hoppers.

2. One facade of the building typically had a series of double doors at each floor level to assist in material handling. This series of doors is also absent in this mill.

3. The facades that faced the river usually had fewer windows in order to shield the mill from the cold winds that rushed off the water. The mills were very rarely heated because of the explosive nature of the flour; this mill is totally symmetrical in fenestration and appears to have been heated.

4. Grist mills were typically constructed of clapboard, braced frame with heavy timbers. This mill is constructed of brick.

5. Roofing was typically shingles cemented together; this mill has pressed metal roofing.

Since the Marshall grist mill is without these features, the structure is architecturally distinguished from its earlier couterparts. These deletions seem to imply that modern technology was affecting this mill building's design. But without the original equipment, it is impossible to make a fair assessment of the effects of inventions stemming from the industrial revolution.

The revolution was having a profound effect on milling in the north. By the time the Marshall grist mill was constructed, milling was gradually being transferred to the wealthy industrialist. Milling was slowly "passing into the hands of corporations with capital research teams, and huge market facilities. The small mills began dropping out of business."

Thus, the Marshall Milling Company building was financed and erected at a time when there was a significant decline in the construction of grist mills this size. In addition, the construction materials chosen by the owner were by no means the most economical available. Mills were typically barn-like structures--primary consideration was given to the availability and workability of the owner's building materials. For example, in Early American Mills, a typical small grist mill was described as follows:

> "The mill structure that housed the stones, gears and sacks of grain was exceedingly functional . . . no ornament with the exception of a weather vane or sign. The usual architecture is most akin to barn construction. Almost all small mills had single-gabled roofs . . . . Of the larger grist mills, most were of the simple gabled type, although a few gambrel-rooied mills were built . . . . Also rare are those mills constructed with brick and stone or in combination with wood."

The Marshall grist mill, on the other hand, is a brick structure. This construction material was almost universally employed in the cotton mills in New England where brick was plentiful. Rarely were grist mills constructed of brick. Thus, the owners of the Marshall Milling Company constructed a building out of expensive materials at a time when the profitability of small grist mills was in question.

Bearing in mind that the architectural features and construction materials reflect the influence of the northern industrial revolution, it can be surmised that the owners of the mill must have been gentlemen of not only cosmopolitan exposure, but also, considerable means.

The style of the Marshall grist mill could support these hypotheses further. It is consistent with the style of the northern industrialized mill town rather than a reflection of the small, self-made millwright working with only the knowledge gained from experience. The Marshall grist mill is reminiscent of several large cotton mills.

Linwood Mill, Whitinsville, Massachusetts (1870), is one example. It is a perfectly proportioned, French form, red brick structure. An earlier mill, "Harmony Mills," in Cohoes, New York, is another example.

Construction on Harmony Mills, designed in exquisite Second Empire style, began in 1826, with a new mill added as late as 1866. The high mansard roofs at Cohoes and Linwood exemplify the influence of the industrial revolution on the style of mill buildings.

As cotton milling structures became too large to provide light and ventilation effectively, the traditional clerestory monitor was replaced by the high mansard with its dormers. Unlike its cotton mill relatives, however, the Marshall grist mill is not too large for the traditional style. Therefore, there is no functional justification for the revival of the French form. It can be assumed then, that the owner made the stylistic choice for reasons that were purely aesthetic, possibly influenced by contact with the blended tyles of the many northern industrial mill complexes.

To conclude, then, the Marshall grist mill is an anomaly. It is located in a distant mountain range far from the industrial north, and was built at a time when individual milling efforts were on the wane. Its flamboyant, international architectural style alone distinguishes this mill from its functional relatives. Further, numerous architectural elements present in other mills are noticeably absent in this one, showing an awareness of the new technology sweeping through the milling industry.

The significance of the Marshall grist mill lies in the fact that its architectural functions have little relationship to each other. On one hand, the building's function reflects the South's historical agrarian dependence, while on the other, its style and architectural character are more a reflection of the international impact of the Industrial Revolution.

Original and Subsequent Owners. (References to the chain of title are in the Madison County Courthouse in Marshall, North Carolina.)

1895 Deed, December 19, 1895, recorded in Deed Book 9, page 17, W. W. Rollins and Eliza J. Rollins to the Marshall Milling Company

Deed, December 19, 1895, recorded in Deed Book 9, page 15, J. M. Gudger, Jr., and Katie M. Gudger to the Marshall Milling Company.

1904 Deed, June 1, 1904, Deed Book 19, page 202. Marshall Milling Company to Capitola Manufacturing Company. (The cotton mill and concrete dam were constructed on this property. Marshall Milling Company kept the grist mill.)

1916 Deed, July 1, 1916, Deed Book 33, page 579. Marshall Milling Company and J. J. Redmon and wife, S. E. Redmon; J. M. Gudger, Jr., and wife Katie M. Gudger; W. B. Ramsey and wife, Minnie G. Ramsey; to Capitola Manufacturing Company (the grist mill and the rest of the property).

1927 Deed, March 14, 1927, Deed Book 49, page 316. C. L. Rudisill, trustee for Capitola Manufacturing Company, to the Marshall Mill and Power Company.

1928 Deed, December 21, 1928, Deed Book 51, page 422. Marshall Mill and Power Company to W. F. Stevens of Chicago, Illinois (the grist mill and dam).

1929 Deed, December 27, 1929, Deed Book 54, page 87. W. F. and Martha S. Stevens to Northwest Carolina Utilities (the grist mill and dam).

1942 Deed, December 18, 1942, Deed Book 70, page 6. Northwest Carolina Utilities, Inc.; O. M. Mull of North Carolina; John W. Perry of Ohio; City Bank Farmers Trust Company; to French Broad Electric Membership Corporation (the grist mill and dam).

1943 Deed, November 27, 1943, Book 70, page 284. Marshall Mill and Power Company to Morton M. Rudisill of Lincolnton, (the cotton mill).

Deed, December 7, 1943, Book 70, page 287. Morton M. Rudisill to the Marshall Spinning Mills (the cotton mill).

1946 Deed, February 15, 1946, Book 72, page 518. Marshall Spinning Mills to Virgin Mills, Maiden, North Carolina (the cotton mill).

1947 Deed, September 15, 1947, Book 77, page 2. Virgin Mills to Marshall Cotton Mills (the cotton mill).

1948 Deed, March 22, 1948, Book 77, page 191. Marshall Cotton Mills to Handal Cotton Mills of New York (the cotton mill).

1949 Deed, January 21, 1949, Deed Book 79, page 61. Handal Cotton Mills to S. Handal and Sons, Inc. (the cotton mill).

1950 Deed, April 27, 1950, Deed Book 79, page 342. S. Handal and Sons, Inc. to John H. Smith, Robert L. Dawson, Alfred F. Burgess (the cotton mill).

1951 Deed, February 1951, Book 81, page 184. John H. Smith, Robert L. Dawson, Alfred F. Burgess to Frank Coxe of Asheville (the cotton mill).

PART 11. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The grist mill is a small building (3 stories plus basement, 36 feet x 52 feet x 44 feet tall). The structure has a mansard roof, sheathed atypically with ornamented pressed metal roofing to imitate patterned slate. The mansard is initiated above the second-story windows by a boldcorniced pent roof line, supported by Victorian scrolled brackets resting on a corbelled edge. A curb is missing from the top of the visible slope, but the roof line is punctuated symmetrically at 2 corners by chimneys.

Also present, and typical of the style, are roof dormers. In contrast with the flattened arch windows and door heads on the first and second floors, the dormers have trabeated windows below a gable line. These are delicatedly enhanced at each eave with a miniature scrolled bracket. The windows are recessed except for the dormers. The windows are also double-hung sash, which was typical for grist mills. The silicon sheet glass lights are typical of the period.

All openings are framed in wood, in a solid-bonded brick wall, headered every sixth course with a brick that is slightly different in color from the other bricks in the wall. Otherwise, the hand-molded bricks are monochromatic and lack rustication.

The cornice corbelling, 2 front pilasters, and pilasters at the quoins offer the only relief to the brick surface. Rustication does appear on two sides, where the hand-stacked and mortared field rock foundation wall is exposed to view. The windows on these two walls are again flat top arch, constructed of field rubble with wood frames that have deteriorated a great deal.

The grist mill structure is classically symmetrical with disciplined ornamentations. One additional curiosity on the brickwork is a large "R" that appears to have been painted on the rear of the building at the second floor level.

The internal framing is heavy timber with typical plank floor construction and floor joists. Slow burn construction was not used. There are many floor penetrations that were apparently used for bucket elevators, a common material handling device of the day.

There is evidence of an abandoned hopper boy on the third floor. This device was used to dry the flour after grinding and was subsequently replaced with roll dryers.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Asheville Citizen Times, July 28, 1949, "Marshall Mill Closes," by James I. Story.

Asheville Citizen Times, March 29, 1951, "Coxe Buys Mill Property."

Asheville Citizen Times, October 26, 1952, "Wood Products Firm Moving to Marshall."

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Fox, William, William Brooks, and Janice Tyrwhitt, The Mill. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1976.

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Wellman, Manly Wade, The Kingdom of Madison. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973.

Whiffen, Marcus, American Architecture Since 1780, A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1969.

Zimiles, Martha and Murray, Early American Mills. New York: Crown Publishers, 1973.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the French Broad Electric Membership Corporation, Charles R. Tolley, General Manager, in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in consultation with the Rural Electrification Administration and the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer as a mitigative effort in the completion of the Capitola Dam Rehabilitation Project. Documentation was prepared by the J. E. Sirrine Company, North Carolina Division, between January 1981 and June 1982, Robin H. Spinks, Project Manager and Historian; Sharon L. Harris, Architect; H. Vance Holt, Civil Engineer; Steve S. Chao, Structural Engineer; Lori I. Cooke, Editor; and Mary Jo Brezny, Photographer.